



U.S. Election Assistance Commission
**Study of the Feasibility and Advisability of Establishing a Program of Free
Return or Reduced Postage for Absentee Ballots**
Focus Group
Discussion Guide for Low-Income Voters

Introduction (5 minutes):

Moderator intro: My name is

Project intro: The Election Center and IFES are jointly working on a project funded by the Election Assistance Commission to identify the challenges that lower income voters face when participating in elections. Our discussion today will help us better understand the needs and challenges of people like you.

Ground rules for today's discussion:

- All points are valid and needed.
- It is okay to disagree—do not be disagreeable.
- Be specific and talk about your own experiences.
- Allow everyone to speak. Speak briefly and often, but please, no speeches.
- One person speaks at a time – please don't interrupt.
- Your contributions are anonymous and will not be connected to your name.
- There are observers in the room, but they won't be participating.

Experiences voting—challenges and remedies (20 minute)

I'd like each of you to think back to the last federal election that you voted in. By federal election I mean voting for the President, the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House of Representatives. What sticks out in your mind about the experience voting—not who you voted for but the process of voting itself?

- Probe: How did you vote: in-person at the polls or by mail?
- Probe: Was the process easy or hard?
- Probe: Did you encounter any particular difficulties?
- Probe: How did election officials respond?
- Probe: How did you resolve the situation?

And have any of you have been in the situation where you wanted to vote but for some reason you just weren't able to?

- Probe: Can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that kept you from being able to vote?
- Probe: What sorts of things do you think could have been done to make it easier for you to be able to participate in elections?

Voting by mail and free or reduced postage (20 minutes)

As you may be aware, there has been a lot of discussion in the last year or so about the pluses and minuses of voting by mail. Some states have what is called "no-excuse absentee voting" that allows anyone who wants to, to be able to vote by mail-in absentee ballot. On the other hand, some states require people to provide a reason why they can't make it to the polls on Election

Day.

What is your overall opinion of absentee voting by mail?

- Probe: Do you think everyone should have the opportunity to vote by mail or should this be limited to those with a valid excuse? For example, being sick, disabled or out of town on Election Day?

Who here has voted by mail?

- Probe: If you weren't able to vote by mail would you still have been able to vote at the polls?

Have you ever had difficulties in getting your absentee ballot or sending it back in?

- Probe: Would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program have made things easier for you or would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program make no substantial impact in your ability to get your vote in?

Do you think that finding ways to make it easier for people to vote by mail-in absentee ballot increase voter turn out among lower-income voters?

- Probe: What sorts of things could be done to make this easier?
- Probe: What would be a good way of letting lower-income voters know about such a program/changes so that they could take advantage of these changes?
- What kind of impact do you think a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program would make on the ability of lower income people to vote?

Concerns about voting (15 minutes)

Still thinking about the elections process and voting, do any of you have personal concerns about voting that you would like to express?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

And do any of you have other more general concerns about election process, voting and lower income people that you'd like to discuss?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

Post Discussion Comment Sheet
Lower Income Voters

Please take a few minutes to complete this form. Your answers to these questions as well as your viewpoints expressed in today's discussions will be kept confidential—your opinions will not be identified with your name.

By answering these questions, you help us understand the types of people who took part in today's discussion, and your opinions and feelings provide us with important information about this discussion that will help us in the future.

- 1) Name: _____
- 2) ☐ Male ☐ Female
- 3) What is your race/ethnicity? _____
- 4) What is your age? _____
- 5) What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?
 - ☐ Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)
 - ☐ (Grades 9 through 11) (Some high school)
 - ☐ Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
 - ☐ College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)
 - ☐ College degree or higher
- 6) How many people, including yourself, are there in your household?

- 7) What is your employment status? ☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ Unemployed ☐ Homemaker
☐ Retired ☐ Student
- 8) In 2005, what was your total household income from all sources?

- 9) Are you currently registered to vote? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 10) How often do you vote? ☐ Almost always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

11) What is the year and type of the last federal election (presidential or congressional) that you voted in? _____

12) Are there any feelings or opinions that you didn't share during the discussion that we should know? Please describe in as much detail as possible.

13) Any comments about the discussion itself and/or the moderator?